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RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 2996
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE 2793
RUEHBM/AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST 1793
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KIEV 0159
RUEHLJ/AMEMBASSY LJUBLJANA 0756
RUEHVJ/AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO 0504
RUEHSQ/AMEMBASSY SKOPJE 4197
RUEHSF/AMEMBASSY SOFIA 2362
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000996

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FROM AMBASSADOR RIES TO SECRETARY OF DEFENSE RUMSFELD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2026
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [MCAP](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR YOUR VISIT TO ALBANIA AND SEDM

REF: A. TIRANA 953
[1](#)B. TIRANA 960
[1](#)C. TIRANA 970

Classified By: Ambassador Marcie B. Ries, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Your attendance at the September 26-27 Southeast Europe Defense Ministerial (SEDM) is the event's highlight for your Albanian hosts. NATO entry is Albania's primary goal, one supported by all levels of society and all political tendencies. The Ministerial provides the chance for Albania to demonstrate its ability to make tangible contributions in the areas of defense and regional security. In his meetings with you, we expect Prime Minister Berisha to reiterate Albania's determination to be "wherever the U.S. is deployed" and to underscore Albania's desire to join NATO as soon as possible. sd from your participation in SEDM itself, this is a chance for you to publicly commend the performance of Albanian commandos in Iraq, Albanian contributions to the GWOT, its involvement including through A3 and SEDM in the progress of defense reform. In your private meeting, however, you should also remind them that they are "considerably more" than they are: in order to achieve their goal, they must devote themselves to defense reform and as essential to the maturity and progress of democratic reforms and rule of law.
END SUMMARY.

COMBAT SUPPORT TO GWOT

[1](#)2. (SBU) In advance of the actual Ministerial, you will meet with President Mosiu, PM Berisha, and DM Mediu. With the latter, you will present awards to some of the Albanian commandos who have returned from service in Iraq. These meetings provide an opportunity to praise Albanian combat troops serving beside us in Iraq, as well as Albania's contribution to stability in the region (Bosnia/EUFOR). Albania was among the first countries to answer our calls for support in the GWOT, and that support has been unwavering. It has been extraordinarily cooperative across the board in these efforts, including by freezing terrorist assets.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Albania currently has a contingent of 120 combat troops in Mosul, Iraq, and 22 Special Operation Forces in ISAF in Afghanistan. In addition, it deployed nine personnel as part of a Southeastern European Brigade (SEEBRIG) headquarters element and has three in the A-3 Joint Medical Unit. There are 71 troops in the EUFOR mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Overall, including troops in training and preparation for overseas deployments, Albania has about a third of its elite troops committed to the GWOT. Despite this already significant contribution, PM Berisha continues to explore other ways to "be where the U.S. is deployed," including recent suggestions that Albania might consider sending troops to Lebanon.

REGIONAL STABILITY AND INTEGRATION

14. (C) Especially under DefMin Mediu's active leadership, Albania has played an important role in encouraging regional defense cooperation. He has played a key role in A3 and SEDM coordination and seeks to make full use of the tools these fora offer. The President and PM have used their influence to urge Albanian Kosovars to show restraint and flexibility in Kosovo status negotiations and have called on the Albanian leadership in Kosovo to do more to protect the rights of minority Serbs. This week at the UNGA, President Moisiu (and Foreign Minister Mustafaj) were careful not to respond to Serbian rhetoric. As Kosovo negotiations reach the "end game," we will want Albania's leaders to continue to be a voice for moderation in Albania and with Albanian leaders throughout the region.

PARTNERSHIP AND PROGRESS

15. (C) Albanian defense forces have provided support for NATO training, participated in NATO exercises, and partnered with us to allow sensitive low-level flight training. The MOD is committed to modernizing the Albanian Armed Forces (AAF) to make it deployable and NATO-interoperable. While there is no doubt about the political commitment, several constraints remain. Albania has not kept to its own schedule for bringing defense spending up to two percent of GDP by 2010. Real spending on defense (excluding retirement) is about \$120 million, with only about eight percent of that amount available for modernization. Albania must focus the MOD's modest resources on creating a "niche capability" that shows it brings something to the NATO table. The MOD is working to equip, train, and modernize the Rapid Reaction Brigade (RRB), the unit it says would be ready for NATO duty if called.

16. (C) But we must continue to reinforce the message that, while we value Albania's bilateral and multilateral contributions, NATO membership is not about defense reform alone. NATO allies look for a reliable partner that shares NATO's democratic values. All new entries have been expected to resolve internal differences and show unity on national priorities before receiving a membership invitation, and those standards still apply. Though it cannot control Albania's fractious opposition, the Government has the responsibility to build a consensus on issues of national concern. The Government must move its strong rhetoric about the fight against corruption beyond words into action)- against money laundering, against trafficking in persons and contraband, and in favor of a cultural sea change to one of respect for lawfulness. At the same time, the GOA must also strengthen its democratic institutions. The campaign against corruption cannot be perceived as a campaign against institutions or individuals with different points of views.

YOUR INTERLOCUTORS

17. (C) As noted Ref B, President of the Republic Moisiu in polls has the highest respect of any elected official among the Albanian population. He is considered honest and a person of integrity. Appointed by consensus of the main political parties (he does not belong to one himself) he plays a stabilizing role in Albania's turbulent domestic political scene and has a Constitutional role in the justice system. He is well placed to guide Albania on the road toward democratic consolidation, but is currently under pressure from PM Berisha, who wants the President to remove the Prosecutor General. The international community has worked to avoid being drawn into this dispute, while at the same time underscoring the importance we attach to adherence to Albania's own laws and Constitution.

18. (C) Like all Albanians, PM Berisha holds the United States in high esteem. Berisha is seeking to erase memories of his forced departure from the political scene (he was then the President) in 1997 under the scandal of the pyramid scheme debacle. We believe he is determined to bring positive change during his administration, but his methods have aroused controversy and criticism. We want to let him know that we appreciate his contributions in the areas of foreign policy, the war on terror, and regional security, but keep the pressure on for more progress on defense reform, and especially development of democratic institutions and fighting corruption.

19. (C) Ref A provides detailed biographical background on Minister Mediu.
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